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AUTHOR Marsee, Stuart E.
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ABSTRACT

While members of a college's board of trustees expect the president to provide them with accurate and timely information, individual trustees also have a responsibility to help the president do an effective job. The board should understand that the president is the one college administrator with an overview of the enterprise as a whole; his/her advice, therefore, should be carefully considered in board matters such as institutional finance, facilities planning, public relations, establishing institutional goals, assessing institutional performance, preserving the institution's autonomy, and settling internal disputes. In addition, board members can take several steps to insure a harmonious board-president relationship, including: (1) develop policies that are workable; (2) realize that the president must make reasonable decisions that may not be universally acceptable; (3) keep politics out of board activities; (4) carefully study board meeting agendas beforehand; (5) refer operational questions to the president; (6) expect communications with college personnel to be channeled through the president; and (7) remain aware of community attitudes toward the college. While the board has responsibility for setting institutional policy, trustees should leave to the president the responsibility for establishing rules and procedures for the implementation of that policy. (JP)

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THE PRESIDENT'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE BOARD

Stuart E. Marsee

President, El Camino College

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The President's Relationship to the Board

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Dr. Laurence M. Gould, former president of Carleton College, said, "A campus chief executive needs: The innocence of a lamb, the wisdom of an owl, the cheerfulness of a cricket, the complacency of a camel, the adaptability of a chameleon, the diligence of a beaver, the vision of an eagle, the patience of an ox, the strength of a lion, the nerves of a cow, the stomach of a boa constrictor, the skin of a rhinoceros, the brass of a monkey, and the charm of a deer."[1]

Presuming the president has all or most of these qualities, there is one more all-important quality that supersedes all others--the ability to work successfully with the board of trustees. Much is said about what the president must do to relate to the board. This paper will identify ways in which the board can help in "the care and feeding of the president."

Both in industry and in education, boardsmanship is becoming work-oriented, time-consuming, and assertive.

Part of the reason for this direction is the increasing awareness of the previous lack of awareness of trustee liability. It has been said that presidents can no longer treat trustees like mushrooms--something you keep in the dark and pile

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[1] The Wall Street Journal, February 8, 1966, p. 10.

manure on. Trustees will not tolerate poor communications from the president. They want facts--straightforward and in a timely manner.

In his study of boards of trustees, John W. Nason listed the following activities or functions of a board of trustees:

1. Selection, retention and removal of the president.
2. Financial support and management of the college or university.
3. Maintenance and expansion of the physical plant.
4. Public relations.
5. Clarification of institutional purposes.
6. Assessment of institutional performance.
7. Bridging community and campus.
8. Preservation of institutions' independence.
9. Court of final appeal on internal disputes.
10. Self-evaluation of trustee performance."[2]

With the exception of items one, (Selection, retention and removal of the president), and ten, (Self-evaluation of trustee performance), the president should be the chief advisor to the board regarding all its decisions. Additionally, the president, as the board's chief executive officer, must administer and manage the institution as directed by the board.

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[2]The Future of Trusteeship: The Role and Responsibility of College and University Boards (Washington: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges 1974), pp 15-23.

The board of trustee-president relationship must be based upon mutual respect and confidence. While the board need not accept the president's advice, it should listen carefully to what the president advises and to the reasons for such advice. "The president is the one officer in a college or university with an overview of the enterprise as a whole. The president is the one officer committed to the preservation and viability of the enterprise. The president is the one officer whose role requires extensive activity outside the academic community. All these defining elements of responsibility combine to ensure that the president is the one person in the academic community who is competent to advise the board of trustees in its decision making."

If the disagreement or disagreements between board and president are extreme, occur often, and/or reflect a deep-seated lack of confidence, the president should resign.

Board don't select presidents with the expectation that they will fail. Stability requires continuity and strength in leadership. Some things the board and/or members may do to prove good faith and to insure stability are listed:

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[3]Millet, John D., The Multiple Roles of College and University Presidents, American Council of Education, 1976, p. 4.

1. Develop clearly stated policies that can be executed reasonably.
2. Recognize that policies do not cover all existencies, that the board is not always available and that the president must make reasonable decisions that may not have universal acceptance.
3. Settle personal differences in such a way that cliques do not occur. This minimizes the necessity of the president choosing sides.
4. Do no leak confidential information.
5. Do not act independent of the board. Board action is legal only when taken at official meetings.
6. Study board agenda and supplementary materials before acting on recommendations.
7. Attend board meetins, be prompt and keep meetings short.
8. Do not use board position for personal aggrandizement or political advancement.
9. Refer questions pertaining to the operation of the college to the president.
10. Support the president and the management of the college.
11. Expect recommendations for employment only on the basis of merit and fitness for the position.
12. Ask only for information that may be transmitted to all board members.

13. Avoid the attitude of ownership.
14. Expect communications with personnel, both upward and downward, to be channeled through the president.
15. Be knowledgeable regarding the "state of the art."
16. Think independently and objectively about problems and situations.
17. Do not place personal interests ahead of those which may be in conflict with the best interests of the college.
18. Reserve judgment on important issues until all available facts have been obtained adn weighed.
19. Be loyal to your principles, but accede to the decisions of the majority.
20. Have a sense of humor.
21. Work "with," rather than "around" the president and the administrative staff.
22. Keep politics out of the Board's behavior.
23. Be aware of, and sensitive to, the cross-currents of community thinking pertaining to the basic concepts of public education and operation of the college without being a lackey to any self-interest group.

Conclusion: The board is concerned with how the college operates, what it teaches, who are the employees, the students and the community people, and how much money is spent. While the board is concerned with efficient operation,

its responsibility should be of a broad general nature. The board establishes general policy under which the college operates. The definitive rules and procedures for implementing policy and for putting it into practice is the function of the president and the professional staff.

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